

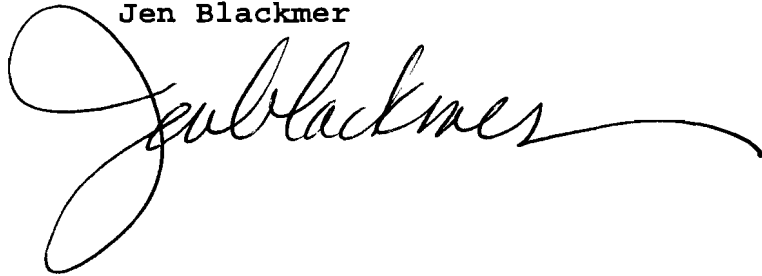
THE CHALLENGER
(A play loosely based on the themes and stories of the book
of Hosea)

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jen Blackmer". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J" and a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.

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Abstract

Out of the seemingly irreconcilable differences between homosexuality and the teachings of conservative Christianity, various camps have emerged to lend their voices. The question must be addressed: can a person with unwanted homosexual attractions switch his or her sexual orientation? On one side of the debate, opponents say that seeking such change is unrealistic and potentially harmful. But on another side, many supporters say not only that change is possible, but that change has occurred for many of them. Realistic or not, there is a rising demographic of people who reject traditional gay/straight labeling, and their stories are not often told, in the Church or anywhere else. I applied some of the themes of redemption and reconciliation from the Old Testament book of Hosea to this heated issue in order to create a script for a play. Inherent in Hosea and important for the people in the Church affected by this debate is the idea that, through all of the pain of the past, God is planting a brighter future; there can be growth even through the things that don't make sense.

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-Finally, I'd like to thank the friends I've made through Exodus International, who daily challenge me to speak my experience fearlessly and lovingly. "We're a nation in exile. But gay, ex-gay, or ex-ex-gay, we're in exile together."

THE CHALLENGER

Characters

J

Izzy

Judith

One from the Gay/Ex-Gay Chorus (as a support group leader, a John, a homeless man/Hosea)

One Wife from the Chorus of Wives (as a phone operator, Judith's doubts, a homeless woman/Hosea)

Gay/Ex-Gay Chorus (as gay hook-ups, passers-by, an ex-gay support group, the forces of the world that make the wind blow)

Chorus of Wives (as Judith's psyche, and the forces that agitate and cleanse)

A Note:

-A / indicates a cut-off in dialogue.

Projection: GOMER

Projection: *meaning unknown*

We hear a 1-800 number dialed. Judith's voice over a phone. In a spotlight, ONE WIFE from the CHORUS OF WIVES as a support line operator sits in a chair, a phone to her ear, listening intently. As JUDITH speaks, J enters, alone, in a park, in the dark.

JUDITH

On his tenth birthday, the Challenger exploded. Izzy's. No, not 'exploded.' 'Disintegrated.' Seventy-three seconds after lift-off, the Challenger disintegrated. I don't know all of what it means, but there was too much aerodynamic pressure, I think the story goes, and everyone watched it fall apart.

Sometimes they say you can tell. How he walks, or dresses, or how he carries himself. His music choice. Movies. Stores at the mall. His friends. What he does for fun. What he does when he's alone... I think I'd seen it in the look. The extra moments his eyes would pause here and there, on a magazine photo, or depending on what's on TV, but just a pause...

We hear the click of a phone;
she has hung up.
The CHORUS OF WIVES and
GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS whisper the
wind from offstage:

BOTH CHORUSES

Hosea...

Light down on ONE WIFE. J
shivers.

J

"How I met your father," she would begin my favorite bedtime story, with the revival coming to town, the church bus, the choir robes and the sweaty preacher man, the billow of the big red circus tent, and how the choir sang sang sang into the summer night.

But she had a reputation as a wild child. They were married and had three children, not his, not his, not his...

And J is a victim of massacre, and there are pieces of J all over this great nation:
Lost his head over his first love,
Lost his mouth to that first kiss,
Then he lost his hands to the man who ran the school carnival rides,
lost them up and down and all around, in tight circles and swooping arcs, faster and faster and tighter and looser, and when he saw his own face in the bathroom mirror afterwards he said,
"YOU ARE NOT MINE,
and you're certainly not loved."

J is

J is a victim of massacre, the center of all human selfishness:
Lost his feet out on the road, on the stoop of the truck stop--
the ghost-howling highway sang him to sleep,
said, "What you got to give to go my way?"
(Funny, because Burke from Albuquerque was saying the same thing, had a warm cab with a mattress in the back.)

J...

J, J, J, J, J...

A victim telling the oldest story in the world says it like this, because he is the center of all human selfishness:

I lost my heart to the first man I ever met. He picked up and left when he found out I wasn't his, even though I always knew he was mine-all-mine. He still sings me to sleep, I hear him echo on the highway sometimes:

"There's no love, no love, no love,
You're not mine, not mine, not mine."

There are pieces of me all over this great nation, places where I got too heavy and got choosy about what to keep. I am a victim of massacre, I am the center of all human selfishness, I am the oldest—

Voices, silhouettes in all directions in the darkness. Some find each other, pair up, exit together. There is constant motion.

BOTH CHORUSES

Hosea...

IZZY and J lie together.
IZZY traces J slowly, deliberately, respectfully: a meditation.

IZZY

Head. Eyes. Jaw. Neck.
Mouth. Teeth. Youth. Tongue.
Hands. Curl. Worn. Smooth.
Feet. Drawn. Stretch. Flex.

J

(Falling asleep.) Heart. Give. Pump. Reach.

IZZY stands, collects his things, leaves. J is asleep.

J

(In his sleep.) Head. Mouth. Hands. Feet.

J wakes, sits up, looks around. He is alone. The GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS materialize around him. They raise him to his feet.

GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS

(Repeated over the following action.) You are man.

You are loved.

You are good as you are.

He walks among them,
searching for IZZY.
They embrace J; they swallow
him up. They exit, J among
them.

JUDITH stands at an easel,
painting. IZZY enters.

JUDITH

Hey.

IZZY

Hey. How's the painting coming?

JUDITH

Pretty good.

IZZY

What is it?

JUDITH

A surprise. Dancing.

IZZY

Dancing?

JUDITH

Yep.

IZZY

How do you paint dancing?

JUDITH

Passionately. Zealously. With desire and commitment. I'm a
strong woman. I have my ways.

IZZY laughs. They kiss.

IZZY

I'm going to bed. Are you coming?

JUDITH

Give me a minute.

IZZY

Don't take too long.

JUDITH

I will if I want.

IZZY

I know, I know, strong woman.

JUDITH

You wouldn't have it any other way.

IZZY exits. JUDITH smiles as she finishes painting. She heads in IZZY'S direction.

J enters. He stands, waiting, as though at a street corner. Members of the GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS pass him as he speaks.

J

"He was different," she would say, son of a preacher man, beanstalk thin, gave out communion to the newly sanctified, "and I," and here she would smile, every time the story came around, "I got saved as many times as I needed to to get that beanstalk preacher boy to come my way and forgive my sins."

ONE from the GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS, as a John, stops and looks him over.

J

You look like/

ONE

How much?

J looks back. ONE begins to exit.

J

Come back and see me some time.

IZZY crosses the stage. The GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS enter with bibles around J; it is his first time at a support group. They are scattered, chatting with each other, when ONE, as the support group leader, stands on a chair.

ONE

If you all would like to sit down, let's begin.

Everyone sits in a circle of chairs. IZZY enters.

ONE

I'm glad to see all of your familiar faces, as well as a few new ones. Let's begin with a word of prayer.

They all bow their heads and freeze, except for J, who sees IZZY in the group. He looks for the duration of the prayer. They unfreeze.

ONE

I know we do this every week, but since we do have a few new friends here, why don't we introduce ourselves.

The introductions begin. They go silently; J takes in IZZY. IZZY sees J, and they share recognition. When the names come around:

IZZY

Israel. Call me Izzy.

J mouths his name. The names come to him:

J

J.

ONE

Well, again, welcome. I'm glad to see you all again, and for those of you who are new, I hope this can be a safe place for you. This isn't a meet market, but it's not a place of judgment either. We've each been through a lot.

Lights down. A spotlight on ONE.

I had a webcam, an internet peepshow, if you will. For two hours a night, I turned the camera on, chatted, flirted, took off what I wanted to take off, did what I felt like doing. It was different every night. Some nights were just about talk, and some nights, it was the full monty. It really is a sweet job, and I'd still do it, if it wasn't what it was. You work from home, you make a ton of money, and anything you touch is like gold to the guys who watch you. Sell it for however much you want; there are buyers. And there are legal things, too, you don't just email someone and start working. There are papers to sign to make sure you're of age, so you can't just invite a friend to perform with you because whoever's running the website doesn't have a proof of age for him.

So this is the part where people think I'm crazy. And maybe I am. Jesus came to me in the chatroom. Literally. Jesus Christ, in the chatroom. And you think, "What's Jesus doing in a gay chatroom?" But church-type people always talk about how Jesus spent most of his time with tax collectors and prostitutes, which is funny, because most of them wouldn't ever do it. Some did, but they weren't hanging out in my chatroom for witnessing purposes.

Jesus came to me, in a gay chatroom. He said, "I'll put you back together." And He did. And He is.

Lights up.

J

I lost my head to my first love, my lips to that first kiss.
I lost my hands to the carnival man, my feet on the ghost-howling highway.

ONE

Tell us...

J

But I lost my heart to the first man I ever met.

ONE

Your father.

J

He picked up and left when he found out I wasn't his, even though I always knew he was mine-all-mine. He still sings me to sleep, I hear him echo sometimes...

ONE

Tell us your name again.

J

J.

Everyone rises as they speak
except for IZZY.

GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS

You are man, J.
You are loved, J.
You are good as you are, J.

They move to embrace him. J
and IZZY look at each other
as the chant repeats. The
GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS dissolves,
leaving J and IZZY. They
stand silently for a moment.

IZZY

What was your name again?

J

J.

IZZY

J like J-A-Y, or J short for/

J

Just 'J' is fine. You're Izzy, right?

IZZY

Israel, when I'm in trouble, but yeah.

J

Same birthday, huh?

IZZY

What?

J

As per the ice breaker tonight. Challenger Day. January twenty-eighth. That's mine too. Though I was born on the actual day, so I guess that means I win.

IZZY

Congratulations. (pause) We can't/

J

Yeah.

IZZY

(pause) What a day to be born, though. A rocket explodes, lights up the imagination of the entire country as it lights up the sky. And pieces of one of us are sent through the air. Like some kind of celebration...

J

Like, "Don't bother buckling up, because you'll be on the ground longer than you expected." How old were you?

IZZY

Ten. I thought it was all a big birthday surprise NASA made just for me. The lottery, Christa McAuliffe... I was pretty convinced I'd get a phone call from space saying "Happy birthday." (pause) Well, it was nice to/

J

Here's where I'm staying.

J takes IZZY'S hand and a pen from his pocket. He begins scribbling.

IZZY

Paper...

He tears a page from the back of his bible. J scribbles on it and gives it to IZZY, who then exits. J looks after him, exits another way.

JUDITH is painting at her easel when IZZY enters. She greets him with a kiss.

JUDITH

Hey.

IZZY

Hey. How's the painting coming?

JUDITH

Pretty good.

IZZY

What is it again?

JUDITH

Dancing.

IZZY

Seriously, why won't you tell me what it is?

Judith

Because I'm a strong woman, and I have to have secrets.

IZZY laughs. They kiss.

IZZY

Wanna be a strong woman in the kitchen and get me some water?

JUDITH slaps IZZY playfully.
She exits as IZZY takes off his shoes, jacket, etc.;
JUDITH re-enters with a glass of water.

JUDITH

How was your meeting?

IZZY sees J enter.

IZZY

It was good.

JUDITH

Anything exciting happen?

J begins a striptease.

IZZY

Nothing huge.

JUDITH

Still gay?

J abruptly stops undressing.

IZZY

What?

JUDITH

Kidding!

IZZY

(laughing) Wow, Judith, that kind of support is such a rarity.

JUDITH

That's why you married me.

She kisses him.

JUDITH

Still gay?

IZZY

Working on it.

She kisses him again.

JUDITH

How about now?

IZZY

I ought to bring you to the meeting some time.

She kisses him a third time.

JUDITH

What about now?

J comes up behind IZZY, whips him around and kisses him fiercely.

IZZY

I'm going to bed. I'm tired.

JUDITH

Of me?

IZZY

Terribly.

JUDITH

What can we do to fix that?

IZZY

I think there are some dishes that need scouring.

JUDITH and IZZY exit
together. J remains onstage.
As ONE from the GAY/EX-GAY
CHORUS, the same as on the
street, dresses behind him:

J

She was from a small town out west where she had a reputation as a wild child. And she was the daughter of alcohol and abuse; her father was a mechanic and a drunk, and her mother said "no" out back behind the drug store where she worked. But he was a machine, so the story goes, he was all mechanical, made of pistons and petroleum, all steam and hydraulics, and she... he was gone before my mother was born.

When she was old enough to walk, her mother was running, bringing around a bevy of fathers for her to choose from. But she wanted the first, the one to teach her dignity, self-respect, and she looked under every boy in town.

The GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS member
kisses his neck.

J

You look like/

ONE

How much?

J

Don't worry about it.

JUDITH, painting at her easel. In the background, the CHORUS OF WIVES are silhouetted, motionless. IZZY enters, holding the paper with J'S address. He looks at JUDITH, who pays no attention. IZZY begins to exit.

Projection: LO-AMMI

Projection: "not mine"

JUDITH

You're running late, don't you think?

IZZY

What?

JUDITH

I just said you're running late. For your meeting. What's that?

IZZY

Nothing.

JUDITH

Can I see it?

IZZY

Why?

JUDITH

Because I wanna see what nothing looks like.

IZZY

It's... nothing.

IZZY exits quickly, dropping another folded note from his pocket. JUDITH does not notice; she goes to her easel. She picks up a brush, begins to paint, then stops for a moment. A voice from the CHORUS OF WIVES:

ONE WIFE

You don't think...

CHORUS OF WIVES

No...

JUDITH begins painting again.

In a park, in the dark, IZZY
traces J: a meditation.

IZZY

Head, eyes, jaw, neck,
Mouth, teeth, youth, tongue/

J

Izzy...

IZZY

Hands, curl, worn, smooth,
Feet, drawn, stretch, flex/

J

Izzy, stop.

IZZY

Head, mouth/

J gets up to leave.

IZZY

What?

J

Are we wrong?

IZZY

What?

The 1-800 number is dialed.
We hear JUDITH'S voice over a
telephone. ONE WIFE, in a
chair, as a phone operator.
She listens intently.

JUDITH

"When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, 'Go take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness...'"

J

You're married, Izzy. You didn't even take your ring off the first time and you didn't take it off tonight either.

IZZY

I thought/

JUDITH

Because there are things that matter more than my happiness and your happiness and everyone else's, that's why.

We hear the click of a phone;
JUDITH has hung up.

J

Well, it's not. Not anymore.

IZZY

But you said/

J

Well, no shit, who wouldn't want to think he had the power to turn married men?

IZZY

Can I please finish a sentence?

J

Why?

IZZY

Because I love you.

Projection: LO-RUHAMA
Projection: "not loved"
JUDITH finds the folded piece
of paper in the middle of the
stage.

ONE WIFE

Surely, he isn't...

CHORUS OF WIVES

No...

The CHORUS OF WIVES
materialize around JUDITH.
She reads.

IZZY

Your head. Your mouth. Your hands. Your feet.
How you give them up so quickly,
Give yourself so free.

CHORUS OF WIVES

Head. Mouth. Hands. Feet.
Drop. Lose. Quick. Free.
Heart. Give. Pump. Reach.

JUDITH and IZZY

"J..."

IZZY

"You've been dancing to every song I've heard since the day I
met you."

JUDITH

"Love, Izzy."

IZZY

I wrote you a note.
Must have left it at home.

J exits, leaving IZZY.
JUDITH goes to her easel
again. She picks up the paint
brush, unable to begin. IZZY
stands, exits another way.

CHORUS OF WIVES

Head. Mouth. Hands. Feet.
Heart. Give. Pump. Reach.

JUDITH

"Love..."

CHORUS OF WIVES

Drop. Lose. Quick. Free.

The CHORUS OF WIVES produce clothing belonging to IZZY: shirts, pants, underwear, etc. As the action progresses, they drop the items and scatter them. JUDITH searches at the WIVES' suggestion. This moves like a ritual.

JUDITH

His shirts-

ONE WIFE

Smell for perfume, cologne-

CHORUS OF WIVES

(whispered) The pockets for earrings, his collar for lipstick.

JUDITH

And pants-

ONE WIFE

The knees, the crotch, for stains-

CHORUS OF WIVES

(whispered) And look for lipstick, always for lipstick.

WIVES bring in hampers from the bathrooms and laundry room. They dump them; JUDITH searches.

ONE WIFE

Now look through the laundry, leave nothing unturned;

CHORUS OF WIVES

(whispered) Root through his clothes, check them for lipstick.

WIVES bring IZZY'S personal effects: books, a planner, papers from an office.

ONE WIFE

Where is he going? What's he been up to?

CHORUS OF WIVES

(whispered) Leaf through the pages for traces of lipstick.

JUDITH

The garbage.

The chant stops suddenly when a WIFE presents JUDITH with a garbage can from the kitchen. JUDITH takes the garbage can, considers for a moment, then lifts it above her head and upends it, showering in the trash. She begins a dance of mourning and the CHORUS OF WIVES, who also pour garbage cans onto themselves, join her. They dance in a circle. Items are thrown up into the air as they dance: crumpled papers, clothing, books. The dance becomes faster and faster. Finally, JUDITH comes to the painting she's been working on. Her voice rises to a shriek:

JUDITH

"You've been dancing to every song I've heard since the day I met you, love, Izzy!"

She rips it in half as the CHORUS OF WIVES wail loudly.

JUDITH

LOVE, IZZY?!

The CHORUS OF WIVES freeze. JUDITH stands in the middle of the huge mess. IZZY enters; he's come home. JUDITH still holds the note. They look at each other.

JUDITH

"Love, Izzy."
'J' isn't for 'Judith,' is it.
J's not even a woman, is he.

Izzy.

IZZY

I'm going to bed.

JUDITH

Izzy!

IZZY exits. JUDITH surveys the mess. Members of the CHORUS OF WIVES pick up the painting and throw it in a garbage can. They retreat to the periphery and whisper a wind:

CHORUS OF WIVES

(whispered) Hosea...

...leaving behind ONE WIFE, as a homeless woman. JUDITH shivers. She has gone outside.

ONE WIFE

It's beautiful.

JUDITH

What?

ONE WIFE

Your painting. Very nice. Very stunning.

JUDITH

Thank you.

ONE WIFE

Someone would pay a lot of money for that, I bet.

JUDITH

But it's ruined.

ONE WIFE

What is it?

JUDITH

I always told him it was "dancing."

ONE WIFE

Who?

JUDITH

My husband.

ONE WIFE

Where is he?

JUDITH

In bed.

ONE WIFE

With whom? (Chuckles.) Sorry, just a little joke. Now tell me, how do you paint "dancing"?

The CHORUS OF WIVES undress JUDITH down to her underwear; it is white. The CHORUS OF WIVES begin to paint her with rich, thick tempera colors from the easel.

JUDITH

I started painting when we first got married. I was recently unemployed and he'd just started his new job. He came home one day with an easel and some cheap paint. "We can't afford that," I told him, we couldn't afford it, but he said, "Paint me a picture." I never know what to paint when someone says something like that, "paint me a picture," "draw me a picture," I don't think on the spot like that.

There was blue for his hair, blue and some green tint. I mixed blue and violet for his eyes, incredibly dark eyes under dark eyebrows, but his face was warm all the same. Red orange yellow warm, a reflection of how he burned.

ONE WIFE

All the colors of the rainbow.

JUDITH is covered with vivid designs: suns, flowers, stars, birds. The CHORUS OF WIVES exit.

ONE WIFE

Very nice. Very stunning.

She leaves JUDITH. J enters,
wandering through the mess.

J

"Love, Izzy." (pause) "Love, Izzy." (pause) "Love."
J is a victim of massacre, lost his head over love.

JUDITH

Do you live here too? I'm sorry, I just met a...

J

Are you okay?

JUDITH

I'm fine.

J

You look... painted.

JUDITH

My husband, um...

J

Izzy?

JUDITH

Oh... oh my goodness.

J

It's getting chilly, you should/

JUDITH

Don't touch me!

She quickly exits.

Projection: JEZREEL

Projection: "God plants"

Both CHORUSES whisper the
wind from offstage:

BOTH CHORUSES

Hosea...

J shivers. ONE from the
GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS, a homeless
man who has been sitting
among the mess, calls out to
J.

ONE

You a gigolo?

J

Excuse me?

ONE

I don't know where you came from, but you can't hustle here, it
ain't legal. No, no, of course not, you're not a gigolo, of
course not. You got a good heart. You're young and dumb and
itchy to keep moving, but you take care of yourself.

J

I wouldn't go that far. Listen, do you know anywhere near here
I can stay for/

ONE

In a hurry?

J

I... what?

ONE

What's your hurry?

J

Um, well... it's getting kinda cold outside, and if I have to
walk a long way I'd rather start now.

ONE

You sure you ain't a gigolo?

J

(pause) Alright, well, it was nice to meet/ you.

ONE

You got a name, gigolo? (pause) I don't bite, gigolo, tell me
your name.

J

I'm not/

ONE

You trying to tell me you've never given away a piece of yourself for something else?

J

You-- (pause) Everybody's given/

ONE

Sure. And what do you think that says about everybody? You've got a nice smile, gigolo. What's your name?

J

(still smiling) It's J. And you need to stop.

ONE

Jay, J-A-Y?

J

No, it's a nickname. My parents were kinda cruel. It's Jezreel.

ONE

Jezreel... The massacre. The seventy sons of Ahab.

J

All of their heads in baskets, all over Israel.

ONE

That's some kind of a history to put on a child, don't you think?

J

Talk to my parents about it.

ONE

Where are they?

J

I don't know. My dad left after he found out my sister and brother weren't his, just like me.

ONE

And your mom?

J

Same as my dad. Out living her life, probably planting more kids with weird names.

ONE

So where do you stay now?

J

Around.

ONE

What about your friend?

J

What/ friend?

ONE

Izzy, I think his name is. Izzy with the spotless shirts and the day planner with the bible verses at the bottom of each page.

J

How did you... Are you some kind of prophet?

ONE

You spend long enough living in someone's trash, you learn a few things about him.

J

Did you know he's married?

ONE

Yes.

J

And his wife/

ONE

Judith.

J

I didn't know she had a name... Judith, she must know his history with men and she married him anyway. She had to be crazy.

ONE

How do you know her insanity from her reason?

J

Why would someone marry a/

ONE

Why did your father marry your mother?

J

She had a reputation. Wild child. They were from a small town, and everyone knew her name. She was the daughter of abuse and alcohol, like her mother before her...

ONE

...generations of grief...

J

...and he still fell in love with her.

ONE

Despite the stories, he fell in love.

J

He was a preacher's son; maybe he was trying to save her.

ONE

Why do we save people? (pause) Why do we step in against our better judgment? (pause) It's a cold night; you sure you're not a gigolo? Boy like you doesn't need to give so much away. Jezreel. That's quite a name.

J

Tell me about it.

ONE

Know what it means?

J

Enlighten me.

ONE

"God plants."

J and the ONE exit. The remaining GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS and CHORUS OF WIVES enter from either side. They rearrange the trash on the stage into the shape of a bed

and spread a blanket over it.
IZZY lies down under the
blanket. JUDITH enters,
still painted.

IZZY

What happened to you?

JUDITH

How long? (pause) How often? (pause) How many times?

IZZY

Judith...

JUDITH

How long? How often? How many times?

IZZY

Don't ask/ questions like that.

JUDITH

When were you going to tell me? How long?

IZZY

Not long.

JUDITH

How often?

IZZY

Not often.

JUDITH

How many times? Say "never."

IZZY

I don't/

JUDITH

Say "never."

IZZY

I don't know how many times. What happened to your painting?

JUDITH

Destroyed.

IZZY

What was it?

JUDITH

I told you.

IZZY

No, you didn't.

JUDITH

Yes I/ did.

IZZY

You said, "Dancing." You can't paint "dancing"!

JUDITH

Yes I can! I can paint passionately, and zealously, with desire and/ commitment.

IZZY

Come on, Judith!

JUDITH

Commitment, Izzy. Setting out to do something you say you're going to do. You don't half-ass it, you don't try and then give up when it doesn't work out, you keep going.

IZZY

What do you want me to do!

JUDITH

You- sometimes I want you take a pill or get an operation or something. But I think, "I married this man, I knew all of the dark parts of him, but I married him, I stepped in and-"

IZZY

And what? Stepped in and what?

JUDITH

(pause) Something in me thought maybe if you were with me you could change.

IZZY

How would that happen/ Judith?

JUDITH

I don't/ know.

IZZY

What do you think you have that no other woman/ has ever had?

JUDITH

Because I was strong enough! Because I knew who you were and chose you anyway!

IZZY

What does that mean, Judith? What does it mean to be strong? Does it mean independence? Does it mean ambition? Does it mean you're impervious? Impenetrable? Does it mean you're a brick wall, an island, a hermit...

JUDITH

It means when my husband starts sleeping with men again, I come out alive! He holds things I can't keep, his meetings, his former lifestyle, his lust, maybe even his love, so I keep secrets too, even if it's just a painting, or my menses, or the feminine mystique, whatever it is, and I keep my hands open to take whatever you can't handle!

IZZY takes in the sight of painted JUDITH. She's very beautiful. They move toward each other. JUDITH wipes paint onto his face and his body.

JUDITH

He's written all over you:
All down your spine, like Braille, and he reads you to sleep.
On your fingers, your face, your feet.
He's scrawled across your heart, he danced--
He's written all over you, and he's written on me too.
Why can't you stop?

IZZY

Because I know how I feel.

JUDITH

Then why don't you go with him?

IZZY

Because I know what's right.

JUDITH

What do you want, Izzy?

BOTH CHORUSES enter. The CHORUS OF WIVES hold a basin of water, and the GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS hold rags. IZZY takes a rag and washes JUDITH. JUDITH takes a rag and washes IZZY.

JUDITH

There. Now we're clean.

They embrace. Some from the GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS lift IZZY as some from the CHORUS OF WIVES carry away JUDITH. IZZY is put down on stage, where J has entered. The GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS EXITS.

IZZY

Christa McAuliffe was chosen out of everyone for Teacher-in-Space. She became a real astronaut, and when the time came, she climbed into a shuttle that would take her out of this world.

J

Izzy...

IZZY

Then lift-off. Then ten seconds, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy. Seventy-three. An O-ring seal in the solid right booster fails, there's a breach, a flare, and the shuttle falls apart. All seven people on board were killed.

J

I know the story.

IZZY

Christa McAuliffe took the dreams of space-hungry civilians with her, and they came back when she did. As if to say, "We'll be here a little longer than we expected."

J

Just talk, please.

IZZY

People will probably hear this story and add it to the canon of "therapy equals cruelty" stories. And then it's just like Christa McAuliffe: everyone knows what happened, everyone has a piece of it, and we won't be able to do anything about it.

J

Why did this happen?

IZZY

The pressure was too much.

J

Why did you come back?

IZZY

It was like you fell out of the sky.

J

Like the Challenger...

IZZY

No, like... rain. It's Death Valley or the Sahara, and you rained. Not in my selfishness, or my folly, or my rebellion, but in my hunger and thirst. You rained.

J

You know, sometimes I wish I'd caught you before God did.

IZZY

We can't/

J

I know. I met Judith, by the way.

IZZY

Oh yeah?

J

Very colorful.

IZZY

Thanks...

J

Beautiful. You're lucky.

IZZY

I know.

J

She's lucky.

IZZY

I need to go back inside.

IZZY exits. ONE from the
GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS speaks
again as the support group
leader. ONE WIFE also
remains.

ONE

Jesus came to me, in a gay chatroom. He said, "I'll put you
back together." And He did. And He is.

People ask what change is like. Do you really turn completely
heterosexual? Do you never again have another gay thought?
Well, it's different for everyone. Some people change to the
point that they get married. Others stay single and celibate.

ONE finds a broom and begins
sweeping up the trash.

ONE WIFE

What's it like day to day? *There's* an important question.
That's different too. Some days you wake up and it's good. You
feel strong, you feel connected, and all of the hurts and
inadequacies of the past don't phase you. Other days, it's like
waking up and stabbing yourself to death, right in the heart,
just to stay away from the thing you want the most.

ONE

After the Challenger, Christa McAuliffe was no longer Christa
the teacher, or Christa the daughter, or Christa the friend.
She was the disappearance of a dream between earth and sky. And
everyone thought, "We'll be stuck here a long time, much longer
than we expected."

ONE WIFE

People ask, "So then is the point to get married and have
children?" Not necessarily. We all carry a lot of baggage, and
the freedom being offered may not be complete freedom from your
sexuality, but freedom from that baggage. We're a nation in

exile. But, gay, or ex-gay, or ex-ex-gay, we're in exile together.

ONE finishes sweeping. ONE
WIFE produces a garbage bag,
into which ONE sweeps the
trash.

Projection: HOSEA
Projection: "God saves"

J

"How I met your father." Sometimes I try to picture him how she saw him, the first time she saw him. It's a small town out west, in the most severe heat of summer. She sits in a dirty sundress outside the drug store where her mom still works. It hasn't rained in awhile. It's too dusty for her patent leather, so she wears her beat-up tennis shoes, even though she feels too pretty for them in her favorite dress. She shields her eyes from the sun in its apex when the rumbling starts. The church bus comes riding on dust clouds, down Main Street to the little chapel they have, and suddenly the town is moving. The red revival tent pours out of the folding doors, and choirs upon choirs of white robes bustle in the wind. They begin to warm-up as a sweaty preacher with his black clothes and his white collar begins to shout, "Behold! He comes riding on a cloud!" when he steps off the bus. Beanstalk thin, son of a preacher, he slows down time and steps through the din. She feels the stir of salvation in her soul, and that's when it starts to rain. In the desert, it rains.

The CHORUS OF WIVES and
GAY/EX-GAY CHORUS whisper the
wind from offstage:

BOTH CHORUSES

Hosea...

J shivers and exits.

END OF PLAY